

The Ladies of Time & Space:
A Gender Study of the Women of *Doctor Who*

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

By

Zachary Aaron Kizer

Thesis Advisor

~~Dr.~~ Maria Williams-Hawkins

Signed

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Abstract

Over the course of 52 years, the BBC science fiction series *Doctor Who* has exposed viewers to a menagerie of female lead characters. In spite of the variety often found in these women, they are expected to fall into a very specific set of characteristics, at least in the minds of the general public. This narrow set of characteristics involves the women of the show being meek, demure, screaming at the monster of the week and existing only to serve as a surrogate for the audience, asking questions to exposit major plot details.

Through videos taken from all throughout the series, I analyze the majority of the show's female leads, showing how many of them bend, if not entirely break, the expectations placed on them both by many viewers and, to an extent, the show itself.

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Author's Statement

The overall goal of my project is to analyze the women of the British science fiction series *Doctor Who*, who have undergone a great deal of change, both positive and negative, in the fifty-two year history of the program. My primary thesis is rooted in a motif purported by Alice Walker, an offshoot of feminism known as “womanism” (Walker, 1983) Derived from the Southern expression “womanish”, which is used to refer to a girl who displays more mature, womanlike tendencies, the basic tenet of this idea is a girl or woman showing that she is far more than society expects her to be.

This theory was perfectly applicable to *Doctor Who*, both behind the scenes and in the show's own fictional universe. The female characters of both the classic and revived series are expected to fall into a very distinct set of characteristics, namely as audience surrogates who ask expositional questions, get captured to advance the plot of the episode, and to give a good scream at the monster of the week. While this is accurate in an extremely broad sense, such a generalization ignores the variety of the program's many female characters. The women of this series quite often bend, if not completely break, the stereotypes that are placed on them, in both very obvious and subtler ways.

In addition, I will also be employing the eight female archetypes put forth by Tami Cowden's article “The Women We Want to Be: The Eight Female Archetypes” (Cowden, 1999). These eight archetypes are; *the Boss*, *the Survivor*, *the Spunky Kid*, *the Free Spirit*, *the Waif*, *the Librarian*, *the Crusader*, and *the Nurturer*. Each will be explained over the course of this paper as they apply to each of the individual women, specifically in how they defy the conventions of these archetypes.

For those unfamiliar with the series, here are the essential bits of information needed to understand the show. The series focuses on the adventures of an alien named “the Doctor”, who travels in time and space in a machine called the TARDIS. The Doctor has many faces, as his spaces can change appearance when mortally wounded through a process called regeneration. A companion, the vast majority of whom are women, often accompanies him.

Analyzing every single one of the women of *Doctor Who* proved to be impossible, and while I have included as many women as I can in order to show the progression of the show’s female characters, I also choose to exclude several of them for one of two reasons. The first is that a number of the female characters simply weren’t interesting enough, either because were merely lead characters for a single episode or simply too thinly written to comment on, to warrant considerable analysis, at least not in the context of my project. The second, and largest, reason for the exclusion of several characters is tied to the fact that many of the series’ black and white episodes no longer exist. The BBC destroyed many 1960s episodes of Doctor Who, like many shows from that era, and as a result four major female characters have little surviving footage. While the missing episodes have been unofficially reconstructed using a combination of the original audio tracks and still images, excluding these seemed like a practical way of trimming my project to a reasonable length.

One of the earliest and most notable examples of the bending of the franchise’s female stereotypes comes from the very first two female characters, Susan Foreman and Barbara Wright. Introduced in 1963, these two women were polar opposites in terms of expectations for their characters. Susan was undeniable the *Waif*, a meek, awkward and

often anxious teenage girl, while Barbara was easily the *Nurturer*, a strong maternal figure to Susan. Susan defies her role somewhat by being extremely intelligent, but she rarely breaks free from her position as a screaming damsel or a weak-willed child.

In Susan's final story, her departure is intended to be a coming of age story, but the execution is rather bungled as Susan herself is given little agency in her farewell. Over the course of the story, Susan has fallen in love with a boy her age, but feels too attached to her grandfather to stay with her new love interest. Learning of her desires, the Doctor makes the decision for her, locking her out of the TARDIS and assuring her that she is now a grown woman who must make her own way in the world. Susan protests that she belongs with him, but the Doctor politely but firmly rejects that idea, saying that while he will return for her someday, until then she is on her own.

The main reason this "coming of age" moment falls somewhat flat is that Susan herself did not make the decision to leave, but instead the Doctor made it for her. Susan is clearly shown as wanting to leave the TARDIS, but in the end the decision is taken almost completely out of her hands. A coming of age should be a moment when one stops relying on her parents and makes her own decisions about life, for better or for worse. This is not what happens with Susan, who remains meek and childlike even when she is supposed to be an independent adult.

Barbara, on the other hand, breaks her stereotype immensely. She acts as a motherly figure, but is very active and often takes charge of the situation even more than the Doctor himself. The show exposes the audience to these two opposites simultaneously, thus displaying that while the stereotypes it places on its women undoubtedly exist, they are by no means inescapable or even really the norm.

Another interesting element to Barbara's character is the fact that she is given roughly equal screen time and agency in the story as her boyfriend Ian Chesterton, who served as a companion alongside Barbara. The primary reason for this equal representation is tied to the show's original intention, to be at least partially educational about science and history. This was accomplished by swapping between futuristic stories focusing on science and adventures set in Earth's past to examine historical events. Ian and Barbara served as a sort of microcosm for this plan, with Ian as a science teacher and Barbara as a history teacher. As a result, Ian and Barbara are elevated to a roughly equal playing field, with each taking charge in each of their respective areas of expertise.

Even characters that do not fully defy stereotypes as Barbara did still manage to subvert them in a number of ways. For example, the character of Victoria Waterfield would appear to be the perfect match for the *Waif* archetype so often attributed to many *Doctor Who* women, at least at first glance. As a wealthy teenager from 1860s England, she is certainly sheltered, timid and non-threatening on the exterior, but she manages to show a sort of inner strength when it is required of her. When confronted by villains, she displays fear, but is able to act in spite of that, which is the very definition of bravery. She rarely breaks eye contact with them, raises her voice at them, and even uses weapons on occasion, which is far more than would be expected of a girl of her background, age and personality.

Next in line is Zoe Heriot, an astronaut/girl genius from the 21st century, who fits the Librarian archetype, a prim and proper intellectual who hides a passionate heart. Zoe breaks the norm by being intelligent enough to rival the Doctor, at least in terms of book knowledge if not in real-world experience. In a scene where both she and the Doctor are

forced to take intelligence tests, the Doctor only outscores her because he retook the tests several more times than she did. The Doctor is far and away more experienced than Zoe, but she can certainly challenge him on a purely intellectual level, which was a first for the women of the series.

Zoe also breaks conventions, albeit briefly, by employing her martial arts skills to defeat a villain, a muscular man a good deal taller than her. Zoe's physical strength is short-lived, coming into play only in this one particular scene, but it is nonetheless refreshing to see a woman serving as "the Muscle", and to see a brainy woman get to exercise a bit of brawn.

A similar approach was taken with the next companion, Liz Shaw, a scientist from 1970s Cambridge University. Like Zoe, her intellect was roughly equal to the Doctor's, but her tenure was short-lived for that exact reason. The producers felt that the Doctor's companions should serve as an audience surrogate, someone to ask the Doctor questions to exposit details for the viewer's benefit, and so Liz was replaced after only a single season.

Her immediate replacement, Jo Grant, served a much more traditional, and even stereotypical, companion role. Jo falls into the Free Spirit archetype, a playful and fun loving girl with a lust for life. While she is certainly upbeat and lively, she is not especially bright or independent, always asking the Doctor questions and always needing to be rescued.

However, Jo does break the companion stereotype in one major way, as she is the first companion to have any sort of romantic connection with the Doctor. In the classic series, the Doctor having a romantic side was extremely taboo, and even with Jo it is only

hinted at rather than outright stated. In her final adventure, Jo leaves the Doctor's company to get married, and while the Doctor supports her decision he is still crushed at her departure. While Jo and her friends raise a toast to her engagement, the Doctor silently sinks a glass of wine, gets into his car, and drives off alone into the sunset. However subtle the implication, it is nonetheless there, and it was a massive departure from the norms for a *Doctor Who* girl.

The next companion in line, Sarah Jane Smith, falls back into the Librarian archetype, but transcends conventions through her independence and her immense rapport with the Doctor. Sarah Jane is written as intrepid, smart, and very capable on her own. Like all companions, male or female, she is inevitably captured, but she often forms her own plans for escaping, rather than simply waiting to be rescued like a traditional damsel.

Part of this independence was due to the influence of Tom Baker, who played the Doctor during this era. Baker insisted that Sarah Jane be written as more assertive, and loudly protested scenes he felt weakened her character. Baker especially hated scenes he felt made her look stupid, claiming that he [the Doctor] would never go around in time and space with a stupid person.

But by far, the strongest element of her character is her relationship with the Doctor. The two share a bond so strong that the Doctor refers to Sarah Jane as his "best friend", a moniker he had never previously given out, and wouldn't again for almost thirty years. In Sarah Jane's farewell scene, she tells the Doctor never to forget her, to which the Doctor wryly chuckles and insists that she never forget him. This scene

encapsulates a relationship that is far more than simply a hero and his sidekick. Instead, it is indeed a deeply rooted friendship, one that is rarely paralleled in the rest of the series.

As iconic as this relationship is, it shifts considerably in the revived series. In the 2006 episode, "School Reunion", the Tenth Doctor reencounters Sarah Jane some twenty-odd years after her departure. Over the course of the episode, the Doctor, and by extension the audience, learn that Sarah Jane had spent the intervening decades depressed and longing for the Doctor to return for her, a wish that sadly never came true. This stands in stark contrast to her established independent nature, as while she was undeniably attached to the Doctor, her wasting so much of life waiting for him seems out-of-character.

However, the biggest departure from Sarah Jane's character is the hints of romance with the Doctor, something that was nonexistent in the classic series. At the end of the episode, Sarah Jane declines an offer to travel with the Doctor again, saying that its best for her to finally move on, no matter how much it breaks her heart to do so. The Doctor jokingly states she will always have her adventures as memories and stories for her grandchildren, but Sarah Jane politely states that she is well past the age to start a family. The Doctor then nicely asks Sarah Jane if there was ever anyone special in her life, to which she responds that there was once a man that she had feelings for, a man she spent some time travelling with, but that he was "a tough act to follow". The two then endure a bittersweet goodbye, with the Doctor embracing her and referring to her as "my Sarah Jane".

This change is an example of a trope that will be elaborated upon later on in this paper, the notion that nearly all of the female companions find the Doctor utterly

irresistible. While Sarah Jane does fall into that trope to a degree, she manages to subvert it more than several other characters in two notable ways. Her love for the Doctor is played more as a romance in hindsight, as if her feelings had always been there but she never truly realized until after she had left the Doctor's company. Secondly, she immediately moves on from her feelings, as she feels they were and are continuing to hold her back. In her later appearances on the main show and her spin-off, *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, she has put her feelings of love firmly behind her, and goes on to save the world many times on her own as a paranormal investigator.

Another excellent example is the character Leela, who falls under the *Crusader* archetype, a headstrong woman who never lets anyone get in her way. A tribeswoman raised in a future jungle, Leela breaks the stereotype of the franchise's women being weak in a very obvious way, as she is one of the few female characters to serve as "The Muscle", constantly using force to get her way and even killing people on a somewhat regular basis. Although she is ignorant of many things due to her upbringing, she still breaks the cliché of the women being there to ask questions for the audience's benefit. In spite of her ignorance, Leela is not by any stretch of the imagination stupid or unintelligent, as she is constantly learning and adapting to the world around her, which is a far more three dimensional role than simply acting as an audience surrogate.

In addition, Leela is notable for being the first female companion to be overtly sexualized, constantly dressed in a revealing leather leotard. In writing female characters, there is always a fine line to walk between empowerment and objectification, and the line between them is never well defined. Actress Louise Jameson received a wide variety of

comments regarding her costume, from a young boy telling her to wear more clothes to women much older than her celebrating how good she looked while being powerful.

Jameson herself was very proud of her outfit, claiming that women are perfectly capable of looking good while still making a political statement. A lot of that statement is reflected in Leela's character, chiefly because Leela is one of the few companions, male or female, who almost never screams when in peril. In fact, while Leela was scripted to scream at the monster of the week, Jameson often refused to perform those scenes, claiming it was totally out-of-character for a woman who spent her whole life hunting alien jungle creatures.

As progressive as Leela's character is, there was a strong possibility that she could have turned not only very regressive, but also extremely offensive. There is single official promotional still of Leela that has Jameson in blackface, and while I have never been able to fully confirm or deny this was the production team's plan, there is evidence that could be called "circumstantial". The biggest clue is that, in her first three stories, Jameson wore dark contact lenses, as the producers felt her naturally blue eyes would clash with her skin tone and outfit.

The second major clue is the inspiration for Leela's name, which is derived from the Arabic name "Leila", which roughly translates to "dark beauty". But by far, the biggest piece of evidence is the fact that *Doctor Who* was no stranger to both blackface and yellowface back in the 1960s and 1970s (Hinchcliffe, 1977). In fact, a story set during Leela's tenure, "The Talons of Weng-Chiang" (Hinchcliffe, 1977), while widely praised, remains endlessly controversial for its use of yellowface on the actor who played its main villain. As stated earlier, none of these bits of evidence indicate the show

initially conceived of portraying Leela this way, but they by no stretch of the imagination dismiss that assumption either.

After Leela, we are introduced to Romana, a member of the Doctor's own species, the Time Lords. As a Time Lord, Romana is unique in that she has two separate incarnations, referred to as Romana I and Romana II respectively. Romana I was the *Librarian* archetype, very educated and highly intelligent but largely ignorant of the world, or in this case universe, around her. Romana I can easily rival, or even exceed, the Doctor's intelligence, at least in terms of formal education. In her first story, Romana I snidely remarks that she graduated top of her class from the Time Lord's Academy, whereas the Doctor barely passed on his second attempt.

Despite her arrogance regarding her education, Romana I is still very naïve and inexperienced. She is horrified and shocked that the alien monsters the Doctor regularly faces on his adventures could even exist. When the pair is told a fake story by a con man, the Doctor immediately shrugs it off as a scam while Romana I genuinely believed him, saying that the crook has "such an honest face". The Doctor scolds her for this, albeit somewhat gently, that good crooks can't have dishonest faces.

The relationship between the Doctor and Romana shifts dramatically when Romana transforms into her second incarnation. More so than any other companion, Romana II is the Doctor's equal, both in terms of intellect and experience, and even her personality mirrors his. In her very first scene, Romana II jokingly puts on a costume identical to the Doctor's iconic trench coat and overlong scarf. While she dons a different costume for the rest of her premiere story, she still wears a costume similar to her male counterpart's. The main difference is that Romana II's coat and scarf are pink and white,

giving her outfit a more feminine appearance, but the intentionality of the similarity is undeniable.

Firmly in the Free Spirit archetype, Romana II is younger, happier, more fun loving and more knowledgeable about the universe than her former self. Just like her predecessor, Romana II's intelligence could rival the Doctor's own, only this time she has the real world experience needed to truly be on par with him. As a result, the Doctor and Romana II's interactions come off not as a two people sniping at each other, but as two people working together to solve the problems they come across. The Doctor asks Romana II for her input on obstacles, and the pair discusses sophisticated topics such as fine art and history's great thinkers.

Romana II is also the second companion to have a romantic subtext with the Doctor, and the hints are even stronger than those hints dropped in his relationship with Jo Grant. A strong element of the romantic implications was the real life, behind-the-scenes romance between actors Tom Baker and Lalla Ward, the latter of whom played Romana 2, a relationship that would eventually blossom into a marriage, albeit a short-lived one. The implied romance is most prevalent in the 1979 story "City of Death", in no small part due to the story being filmed on location in Paris, France.

At the top of the Eiffel Tower, the pair shares a light-hearted conversation about the atmosphere of Paris, and exchanges a handful of charming smirks at each other. While running through the Parisian streets, the Doctor takes her hand, something he rarely, if ever, did with his other companions. But by far, the biggest hint comes in the story's final scene. The Doctor and Romana II wave goodbye to their friend, before

rushing off to their next adventure while charming, whimsical music plays, all set in the most romantic city in the world.

The romance with Romana II is a considerable departure from the one with Jo Grant. Both women may be lovely and energetic, but, unlike Jo, Romana is far more than someone who simply exists to “pass the Doctor his test tubes and to tell him how brilliant he is”. Instead, we have the Doctor developing feelings for a woman who can keep up with mentally, and who has the same eccentric attitudes and wanderlust as him. For the first time, the Doctor treats an intellectual equal not as a rival or merely a friend, but as someone who cares for deeply and truly, and it would be some thirty years before the Doctor would travel with someone even close to his level again.

Following the two incarnations of Romana, viewers met Tegan Jovanka, an Australian flight attendant from the 1980s. Tegan was the first female companion to fall into the *Boss* archetype, the woman who stands up for herself and never bows down to anyone. Often described as a “mouth on legs”, Tegan is fiercely outspoken and independent. Her main storyline in her premiere season is that the Doctor is attempting to return her to her job at Heathrow Airport, and is less than successful. Tegan is not afraid to criticize the Doctor, shouting at him for his failures and mocking him for being a Time Lord who can’t even travel through time properly.

In spite of her whining and criticism, Tegan does still manage to show a great deal of loyalty to the Doctor. At the end of her first season, she finally returns to Heathrow, but hesitates at the thought of returning to a life run by a strict flight schedule, realizing that traveling the cosmos is a truly wonderful thing. However, she changes her mind just a little too late, and the Doctor departs without her thinking she’ll be happy back on

Earth, and Tegan is left behind in tears. While she returns in the next season, her heartbreak emphasizes the point that a companion can be loyal to the Doctor while still standing up to him when the need arises.

Tegan often shows a great deal of emotional strength and resolve, even in moments that would normally come off as times of weakness. In her final story, Tegan leaves the Doctor's company as she feels as though she has seen too much violence to continue on her adventures. The Doctor attempts to reason with her, but Tegan has made up her mind, stating that her adventures are no longer the source of joy that they once were. Tegan is not simply giving into her fear and misery; she is making a conscious and informed decision of her own volition, regardless of the Doctor's wishes. Even when buckling under external pressure, Tegan is still in charge of her own actions, in spite of what others want from her.

Unfortunately, the next companion, Peri Brown, is a considerable downgrade from Tegan. An American college student from the 1980s, Peri is a throwback to the Waif archetype, and is a far worse example of that trope than previous companions. All of the problems with her character can be summed up by one single scene.

Immediately after the Doctor regenerates, he begins to experience bouts of temporary insanity, which soon manifest itself in hostility towards Peri. The hostility reaches its apex when the Doctor strangles Peri and wrestles her to the floor, before she is able to overpower him and he slips into unconsciousness. After the scene, the Doctor never even seriously attempts to apologize for what he did, and the attack is never mentioned by either of them again for the remainder of Peri's tenure as a companion.

This strikes an obvious and deeply disturbing parallel with domestic violence, and the fact that is seldom referenced again in no way dispels that comparison. The relationship between the Doctor and Peri is further poisoned by the fact that this is the new Doctor's first adventure, so any claims this attack is out of character are hard to swallow. And for the remainder of her tenure, Peri still shows a great deal of loyalty to the Doctor, almost as if his attempt to kill her for no good reason never happened.

Further harming her character is the issue of sexualization. As shown by Leela, sex appeal can be used to empower a female character if she is written to be strong and assertive. However, Peri is usually written as meek and whiny, and is rather tolerant of the Doctor's patronizing ways when, as proved above, she has a very good reason to not be. This personality of weakness coupled with increased sex appeal does not create an image of empowerment, but instead more of objectification.

The final companion of the classic series, Dorothy "Ace" Gale, is vast improvement over Peri. A return to the Crusader archetype, Ace was a working class delinquent from 1980s London, and so reflected a good portion of social issues of the time, namely poverty and racism. In addition to her poor background, Ace was deeply affected by the racial tensions of her hometown, with her stating a major factor in her resenting society was the firebombing of her best friend's home by white supremacists. Ace was the one of the first companions to have strong political subtexts to her character, but the most important element to her is her unique relationship to the Doctor.

The dynamic between the Doctor and Ace stands out as he seemed to treat her not as a just a friend, but as something of a student that he was grooming for something more. This is reflected by the fact that Ace refers to him as "Professor", a term which

refers to a teacher, while “Doctor” refers to a healer. The Doctor takes on a number of adventures to help her grow as a person, namely to overcome her personal fears and insecurities to ensure she matures into a well-balanced adult. The Doctor also puts her through challenges that may seem too harsh for someone her age, but he goes through with these plans because he is fully aware that she is strong enough to handle them.

The production team’s plan was to end this story arc by having Ace leave the Doctor’s company to attend the Time Lord Academy on his home planet, where she would train to travel the cosmos on her own. However, this plan was never realized on-screen, as the series was put on hiatus in 1989, which lasted until the show was revived in 2005. While this story arc was never given proper resolution, it is nonetheless a fascinating look at the changes in attitudes toward women on the show in its twilight years compared to its infancy. No longer is a teenage girl expected to be a damsel, but instead one strong enough, emotionally and physically, to take on a role in the universe on par with the Doctor’s own.

Midway through the hiatus, in 1996, there was a failed attempt to revive the series in the form of a made-for-television movie. While the series would not fully be revived for another nine years, there is one major element from the telefilm that would have a profound effect on the series afterwards. For the first time, the Doctor had an explicit, undeniable romance with a female companion, which would be repeated a number of times in the new series.

The companion in question is Grace Holloway, an American cardiologist from the 1990s. Firmly in the Librarian archetype, Grace is mostly an average and unremarkable companion, aside from her romance with the Doctor. Nonetheless, her explicit romance

with him makes her extremely significant. She and the Doctor share at least three romantic kisses over the course of the film, which is the first time there had ever been such a romantic display between the Doctor and any woman, companion or otherwise. As a result, however, this was the beginning of the trope discussed before, the idea that the Doctor is utterly irresistible to women, a trope that would be repeated for a good portion of the new series.

The first companion of the revived series, Rose Tyler, follows into this trope. A Free Spirit archetype, Rose is a young adult from twenty-first century London, a description that would become so common in modern *Doctor Who* it has almost become a stereotype by 2015. Rose's love for the Doctor takes the form of almost blind devotion, much to the detriment of other relationships, namely with her mother, Jackie Tyler. This is epitomized in the 2006 episode, "Doomsday", when the Doctor attempts to send Rose and Jackie away permanently for their own protection. Rose refuses to leave, much to the heartbreak of her mother. When the Doctor tells Rose that because of this she will never see her own mother ever again, she simply states that "she made her decision a long time ago", and that she will never ever choose to leave him.

While not the first romantic companion, or even the first explicitly romantic companion, Rose shares one of the strongest romantic bonds with the Doctor. Interestingly, though, her love for him was not automatic. Rose first meets him in his Ninth incarnation, but does not openly display or hint at feelings for him until he regenerates into his much younger, more traditionally handsome Tenth incarnation. As shown by the previously mentioned scene, her interest in him goes beyond external

appearances, but it is nonetheless an interesting side note, as it seems to partially subvert the notion that women are less concerned about good looks than men.

After Rose, the Doctor teamed with Martha Jones, a medical student from modern London and the first, and to date, only major non-white companion. Firmly in the *Librarian* archetype, Martha also fell head over heels for the Doctor, but unlike Rose her attraction was evident from the very beginning. In her first episode, the Doctor must kiss her as a part of his plans. He apologizes to her for having to do so, and insists that it means nothing, but afterwards a breathless Martha incredulously remarks, “THAT was nothing?!”. Martha’s unrequited affections for the Doctor are the primary thrust of her character, continuing all the way to her departure, where she claims she has to “get out” of her relationship with a man who has no feelings for her.

As a result, Martha is by far the companion who suffers the most from the “irresistible Doctor” trope. Nearly all of her major character scenes focus solely on the romance, and as she was only a regular for one season there is no chance to develop her after she finally moves past her feelings. In the following season, Martha guest stars in a few episodes, where we have discovered she has gotten engaged in her time away from the Doctor. This may sound as though it is a sign that she has moved him, she herself describes her fiancée as a “Doctor who disappears to faraway places” in order to help people, which utterly undermines that inference.

In terms of her race, Martha is slightly more progressive in the manner in which her skin color is handled. In stories set in the present day or in the future, Martha’s race is not even brought up, not by her, the Doctor or anyone else. It is also addressed as an issue in stories set in the past, and then it is explored in a number of ways.

In the episode, “The Shakespeare Code”, set in 1599, Martha is at first concerned that she could be carted off as a slave, but the Doctor assures he she is safe with him. Later in that episode, she is called terms such as “Blackamoor Lady”, “Ethiop Girl” and “Queen of Afric”, words that were harmless or even complimentary in that era, but Martha still finds them rather appalling. In the two-part episode “Human Nature/Family of Blood”, set in 1913, Martha has to go undercover as a maid in an English boarding school. In this story, she suffers much more direct prejudice, from both the students and the school nurse, the latter of whom refuses to believe a “women of her color” could be training to become a doctor. Martha takes particular umbrage at this notion, and refutes it by flawlessly reciting every bone in the human hand.

The handling of Martha’s race by the writers depicts it as a part of her, but it is by no means her defining trait. Her skin color is never treated as a main plot thread or even a major theme in the stories in which it is brought up. Martha stands up for herself as much as she can, but she never attempts to change the course of history nor does what she faces become negative enough to discourage her from travelling in the TARDIS. The show is not attempting to gloss over prejudice and discrimination, but rather pushes the idea that this was a part of society once and we have largely moved beyond such things. While Martha may not be very progressive in terms of representing gender, she does make a notable stride in terms of representing race.

The next companion, Donna Noble, is a refreshing return to the *Boss* archetype and differs from the modern companion norms in several different ways. First, at roughly forty years old, she is considerably more mature than either Rose or Martha, and so is much closer to the Doctor’s superficial age. Second, Donna is the first companion of the

new series to have no romantic interest in the Doctor whatsoever. In fact, other characters mistaking the two for a couple becomes a running gag. Third, Donna was the first companion to really purport the idea that the Doctor needs his travelling friends every bit as much as they need him. These three elements are key factors in terms of what makes Donna stand out amongst the modern companions.

Donna being much closer to the Doctor's visible age was important as it lends credence as to why she stands up to him much more than her younger predecessors. Whereas Rose and Martha mostly tolerated the Doctor's eccentricities and authoritative tone regarding time travel, Donna was far more willing to challenge him on those fronts. In her premiere, "The Runaway Bride", she is inadvertently transported into the TARDIS on her wedding day, much to her annoyance. When the Doctor examines her, talking at a mile a minute pace about possible causes for this anomaly, Donna slaps him across the face and demands that he focus on returning her to the ceremony immediately. In the 2008 episode, "The Fires of Pompeii", Donna insists the Doctor change history and save the titular city from the coming volcanic eruption, in spite of the Doctor's constant dismissals. While the Doctor refuses to save the whole city, he does eventually consent to saving a single family from certain death, proving that she has a certain amount of sway over him.

Donna's utter lack of romantic feelings for the Doctor was a refreshing change for the modern companions. Throughout her tenure, people often mistake the two for a couple, but the pair simply shrugs it off at every turn. The running gag reaches its climax in the 2008 episode "The Unicorn and the Wasp". In that episode, the Doctor is poisoned

and needs a big shock to purge the toxins from his system, and so Donna successfully gives him one by kissing him.

But by far, the most notable aspect of Donna's character is that she illustrates the idea that the Doctor needs his companions every bit as much as they need him. In the 2008 episode, "Turn Left", Donna is thrust into an alternate reality where she never met the Doctor, which results in him perishing during the events of "The Runaway Bride". The episode pins his demise on one particular scene from the latter episode, where Donna sees the Doctor going to far in defeating his enemies and telling him, "You can stop now!" This proves the Doctor needs the women in his life not only to befriend and support him, but also to challenge him.

After Donna, the audience was introduced to Amy Pond, a *Free Spirit* archetype who, while a bit more conventional than Donna, still managed to break several modern companion stereotypes. First meeting the Doctor as young girl, Amy turns him into her imaginary friend, the "Raggedy Doctor". When the Doctor returns for her as an adult, Amy jumps at the chance to travel with him, and soon reveals to him that her feelings have blossomed into romance, without the slightest care for her adult responsibilities. However, this is extremely complicated by Rory Williams, Amy's fiancée.

Amy rushes off with the Doctor, and at first seems remarkably disinterested in the man she plans to marry. However, this regrettable return to the "Doctor is irresistible" trope is soon overturned. In the finale of her first season, Amy and Rory get married, and in an interesting twist of expectation, and for the first time we see a married couple travelling in the TARDIS. While Amy still has a strong attachment to the Doctor, she has firmly put her romantic feelings behind her and shows a fierce loyalty to Rory.

This fierce loyalty is put to the ultimate test in Amy and Rory's final adventure, 2012's "The Angels Take Manhattan". At the end of this story, Rory is stranded several decades back in time, and the Doctor is unable to retrieve him with the TARDIS. Amy is given a choice: either get sent back with Rory, or stay with the Doctor. Whichever one she chooses, she will never be able to see the other ever again. With tears in her eyes, Amy is sent back to her husband, leaving a devastated Doctor behind. Amy's choice signifies extreme maturity on her part, and subverts the "Doctor is irresistible" trope in a far more significant and successful manner than Rose or Martha.

The next companion in line, future archaeologist River Song, is by far one of the most unique and important companions of the revived series. River is the first companion to fall into the *Survivor* archetype, a strong-willed woman full of mystery and who is not afraid to manipulate things and people to her advantage. While the Doctor has had several companions that could rival his intelligence, and at least one companion who could match him on nearly every level, but River Song is the only companion who is arguably on a superior level to the Doctor.

This superiority is due to the fact that River is from the Doctor's own future. First appearing in 2008's "Silence in the Library", River sends a message back in time asking the Doctor for help. However, the message reaches him at a point in time long before he has actually met her. As a result, River is aware of events that have yet to occur from the Doctor's perspective, a trend that continues throughout many of her future appearances.

But aside from her superior knowledge, River Song shares what is easily the closest and strongest bond out of any companion. In 2008's "Forest of the Dead", in order to secure the past Doctor's trust, she reveals that she knows a secret about him that

he has never revealed to anyone, including the audience, his real name. The Doctor is immediately floored by this revelation, stating that there is “only one reason” he would ever tell anyone his true identity.

This is eventually revealed two seasons later, where the two of them get married. While not a traditional marriage, instead part of River’s convoluted plan to save the Doctor’s life, there are still strong signs of a true and unconditional romantic bond between the two. For the first time, the Doctor is not in love with someone beneath him or even on par with him, but someone stands at least a few levels above him.

The final companion in this paper, and the current one on the series itself at the time I’m writing this, is Clara Oswald. A *Free Spirit* archetype, Clara is much more conventional than her immediate predecessors, but still reinforces many of the themes that previous companions asserted. In particular, Clara further drives home the notion that the Doctor needs his companions to survive.

In 2013’s “The Name of the Doctor”, a villain travels all throughout the Doctor’s past and undoes every victory he achieved. Despite the Doctor’s warnings about the danger to herself, Clara follows the villain and resets the timeline back to what it was before. While this theme is something of a rehash of its execution with Donna, with Clara it is done on a considerably grander scale, and it is always a potent and progressive theme to support.

Clara is also a return to the theme that a companion can be loyal to the Doctor without being subservient to him, as previously illustrated by Tegan and Donna. In 2014’s “Dark Water, Clara’s boyfriend Danny is tragically killed in a car accident. Distraught over the sudden loss, Clara steals every TARDIS key the Doctor has and

threatens to destroy them by tossing them into a volcano unless he goes back to save Danny. The Doctor continuously refuses, and, one by one, Clara throws every last key into the volcanic crater.

While it's then revealed that Clara didn't actually destroy the keys, she was fully convinced this was the case while throwing them into the lava below. She apologizes profusely for abusing their friendship in such a manner, proving she does value their relationship, but the fact she was willing to do something like this to her dear friend proves she is anything but submissive or passive. Being loyal and being subservient are by no stretch of the imagination one and the same thing.

As with almost all stereotypes, those applied to the women of *Doctor Who* have some basis in reality. However, having a basis in truth does not in any way validate stereotypes as the absolute truth. Being ignorant does not block one from learning; feeling fear does not stop one from acting bravely, and most of all being expected to act a certain way is by no means a barrier to acting differently, in however subtle a manner that might be.


Doctor Who has proven in spades that women can be far more than what is expected. A schoolteacher from the 1960s can be a charismatic leader. A teenager from the Victorian era can be strong in spite of her fear. A savage can be intelligent and hungry for knowledge. While they still fit into the aforementioned characteristics to some degree, these characteristics do not define or even confine them.

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The Ladies of Time & Space

By Zak Kizer

A Gender Study of the Women of *Doctor Who*

A look back at the many women who have travelled in that little blue box over the years.

Presentation followed by discussion

December 14th, 2015 7 PM

Letterman Building Room 121

Ball State University



Rhetorical Statement

- ◉ Over the course of 52 years, *Doctor Who* has featured many major female characters, each reflecting attitudes toward women of the time. Over the years, said attitudes have changed, as have the women of the show, but not always for the better.

Rhetorical Statement

- ◎ This presentation will use the womanist theories of Alice Walker to analyze the show's many leading ladies. More specifically, it will look at how many of the women break, or at least subvert, the "screamer" stereotype often attached to them.

Alice Walker's Womanism

- ◉ Derived from Southern expression, "womanish girl"
- ◉ Defined as a girl who "exhibits behavior that is considered to be beyond the scope of societal norms"



Womanism Definition

- ◉ “Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior”
- ◉ From “womanish”, antonym of “girlish”, i.e. “frivolous, irresponsible, not serious”

The Eight Archetypes

- ◉ The Waif
- ◉ The Boss
- ◉ The Survivor
- ◉ The Spunky Kid
- ◉ The Librarian
- ◉ The Crusader
- ◉ The Nurturer
- ◉ The Free Spirit

- To be explained in detail as we go along
- One or two companions for each archetype represented

Brief intro to *Doctor Who*

- ◉ The Doctor is an alien who travels through time and space in a machine called the TARDIS
- ◉ Often accompanied by a companion, the majority of them female
- ◉ When mortally wounded, the Doctor regenerates into a new body



The Vast Majority



----- Meeting Notes (11/20/15 17:53) -----

- Female companions are so common that the show itself pokes fun at it

An Unfair Stereotype

- ◉ Female companions, particularly those of the show's early years, have a reputation as helpless damsels
- ◉ Not entirely unfounded, but far from the norm
- ◉ Extremely varied female cast, with some early companions outshining later ones

An Unfair Stereotype

- ◉ "...the Doctor's assistants were there to ask for plot clarification, get captured, and provide a good scream when a monster showed up."- Terrence Dicks, *Doctor Who* script editor, 1970-1974
- ◉ "...the Doctor's companions prior to her had largely been attractive but stupid women..."- Deborah Pless, referring to female companions prior to 1979

Victoria Waterfield



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:18) -----

- Upper class girl from the 1860s
- The Waif- damsel in distress
- Timid & non-threatening on the exterior
- Many aspects of the "screamer", but far more nuanced than usual
- Possesses inner strength and resilience, far more than to be expected from a girl of her time and upbringing

Strong in spite of Fear



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Never breaks eye contact with the monsters, raises her voice, fires a gun
- More strength than one would expect from someone like her

Peri Brown



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- American college student from 1980s
- Meek, whiny, snarky, devoted to the Doctor even when she REALLY shouldn't be
- "Maligned as eye candy/sex appeal, a character "for the dads..." -Stephanie Lai

“For the Dads”



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Sex appeal is not inherently a negative, as shown by Leela

A Scene that Lives in Infamy



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Doctor's post regeneration madness at a whole new level
- Peri stays afterwards, never referenced again, questionable implications
- Plan to make the Sixth Doctor darker and edgier, backfired immensely

Barbara Wright



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:18) -----

- Schoolteacher from 1963
- The Nurturer, the one who takes care of everyone else
- Matriarchal figure of the TARDIS "family"
- Very assertive, often takes charge of situation when she needs to
- Not afraid to stand up to the Doctor, who at this point was a more passive, grandfatherly character
- Show meant to educate about science and history, Barbara taught history, Ian taught science, both get comparatively equal spotlight as a result

Kind but Assertive



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:18) -----

- Found a way back to home time, but the Doctor thinks its too dangerous
- Ian and Barbara both stand up to him, Barbara is more soft spoken and practical, but still just as assertive

Jo Grant



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Gov't agent from 1970s England
- Free Spirit, playful, fun loving, optimistic
- Far more stereotypical female companion, loyal & well-meaning but not especially bright
- Romantic subtext between her and the Doctor, extremely taboo for the classic series

Mistakes & Questions



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Someone to make mistakes and ask questions for the audience
- Remember that opening quote? This was during Terrence Dicks' tenure

More than Friends?



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Jo leaves to get married, note the Doctor's reaction, romance not stated but strongly implied

Romana



----- Meeting Notes (11/9/15 19:57) -----

- Two incarnations, talked about separately as they are two different characters

Romana II



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 14:14) -----

- Younger, happier, more fun-loving, more knowledgeable about the Universe
- The Doctor's equal, more so than any other companion
- Sort of a female Fourth Doctor, possible hints of romance

Scarf & All!



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Her costume mirrors his, but has a more feminine appearance

On the Same Page



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Two people on the same level, no sniping, neither talks down to the other

Romantic Subtext?



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Strong romantic subtext, helped by location filming in Paris, mirrors real life romance between Tom Baker and Lalla Ward

Amy Pond



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 14:07) -----

- Twentysomething Scot from modern day
- First meets the Doctor as a child, he is her imaginary friend, the Raggedy Doctor
- Feelings blossom into romance, complicated things for her fiancée Rory Williams
- Struggle between childhood and adulthood

Who Does She Choose?



----- Meeting Notes (11/9/15 20:04) -----

- Breaks the trope of the Doctor being irresistible to women

It Ends in Tears



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 14:07) -----

- Rory becomes trapped in the past, she can go with him or stay with the Doctor
- Whoever she chooses, she'll never see the other again
- Heart wrenching coming of age moment

Liz Shaw



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Scientist from 1970s Cambridge
- The Librarian, prim, proper and intelligent but possesses a good deal of passion
- Intelligence could rival the Doctor's
- Breaks the mold of the companions being someone to whom the Doctor could explain things (audience surrogate)
- Replaced after only one season for the same reason, referenced in the show itself

What the Doctor Really Wants



----- Meeting Notes (11/9/15 19:53) -----

- Can't get more explicit than that

Sarah Jane Smith



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Journalist from the 1970s
- Easily the most iconic companion, the Doctor's "best friend"
- Intrepid, intelligent, quick on her feet, immense rapport with Tom Baker

Behind-the-Scenes

- ◉ Baker insisted Sarah Jane be written as more assertive, loudly protested scenes he felt weakened the character
- ◉ “Look, I don’t think Lis should do that because that makes her look stupid...I would not go round in space with someone who is stupid!”- Tom Baker

Old Friends Parting Ways



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Strong friendship, platonic bond, attachment but not romance

A Second Goodbye



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Much stronger implication of romantic feelings, perhaps romance in hindsight?
- Wasted many years pining after the Doctor, out of character?
- Puts it behind her, goes to save the world on her own many times in spin-off show
- "all women love the Doctor" trope of the new series

Martha Jones



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 14:07) -----

- Medical student from 2000s London
- First major non-white companion
- Brave, smart, loyal
- Only major story arc is her unrequited love for the Doctor, still hung up on Rose, repetitive and one-note story

Unrequited Love



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 14:07) -----
- All of her major character scenes

Different Times



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 14:07) -----

- Her race is ignored in stories set in the present day or the future
- Only an issue in stories set in the past
- Racism is presented as outdated but benign terms and outright intolerance
- Martha is fully aware of the dangers, stands up for herself as best she can
- Never a major plot point, race is part of her but does not define her

Leela



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----
- Note her blue eyes and light skin tone

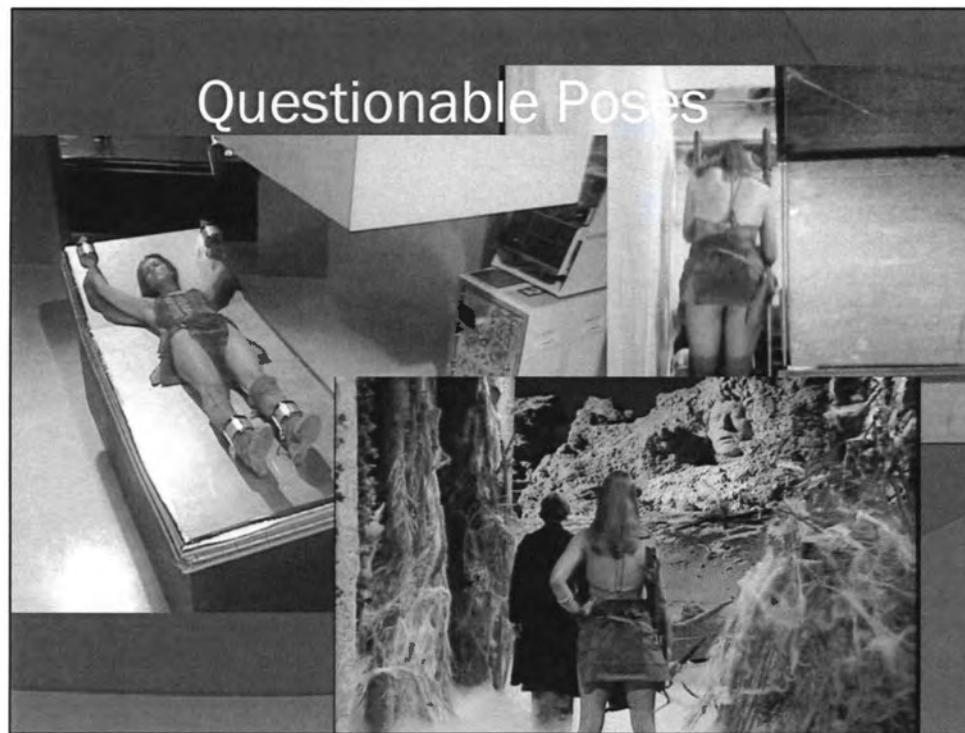


----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Famous partly because of her costume
- The Crusader- woman on a mission, bursting with confidence
- Tribeswoman from the far future
- First female companion to serve as The Muscle
- Blunt, ignorant, violent, still very intelligent and always learning
- From Arabic name Leila, "dark beauty"
- Actress Louise Jameson often refused to perform scripted screams, out of character for her, except for almost getting ripped apart by a giant mutant rat

Objectification or Empowerment?

- "The reactions were varied, from a 4-year-old writing to ask me to put some clothes on to women my mother's age acknowledging that power and sex appeal can go together. In fact, sexy women are indeed very powerful because of what they are endowed...it is perfectly all right to look terrific and be political." - Louise Jameson



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Aside from costume, not very sexualized, aside from a few risque shots

Ignorant, Not Stupid



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Ignorant of many things, but able to grasp ideas and not afraid to ask questions

Savage Beauty



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Puts the "savage" in savage beauty
- Kills on a regular basis

Dark Beauty?



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Remember "dark beauty"
- Official promotional still
- Never confirmed this was the plan, some evidence that could be called "circumstantial"

Brown Eyed Girl



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Wore brown contact lenses for her first three stories, only returned for another season after they were written out
- Production staff felt her blue eyes would clash with "outfit and skin tone"



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- No stranger to blackface and yellowface, even as late as 1977
- BBC continued using minstrel humor well into the 1980s
- Not unreasonable to think this was their intention

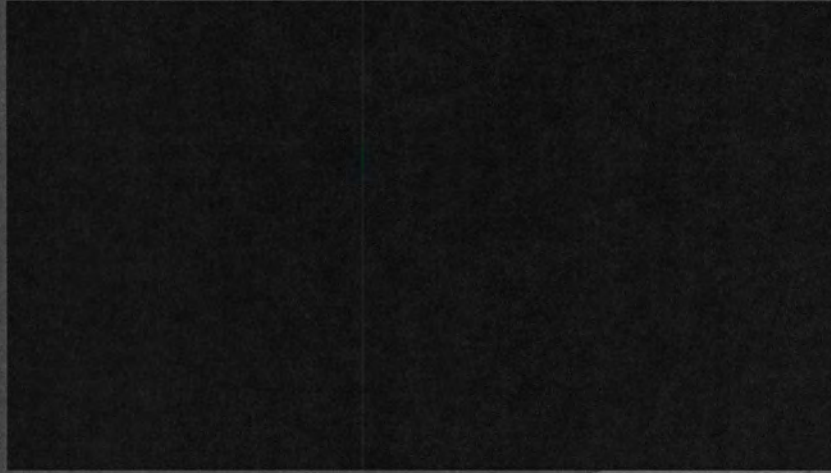
Ace



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Working class delinquent from 1980s
- Tomboyish, skilled with weapons, first action heroine since Leela
- Doctor treats her more as an apprentice, grooming her for something more, she calls him "professor", Doctor takes her on adventures to help her grow as a person

A Girl & Her Weapons



Personal Growth



----- Meeting Notes (11/9/15 20:01) -----

- Puts her through the wringer for her own benefit
- Has to put her in harm's way, but knows that she is strong enough to take it
- - Plan was to reveal the Doctor was training her to be a Time Lord, never realized as the show was pulled in 1989

Tegan Jovanka



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Australian flight attendant from 1980s
- The Boss, the woman who takes charge and speaks her mind
- Stubborn, determined, loyal but not afraid to speak her mind or stand up to the Doctor, a "mouth on legs"
- Filled role of audience surrogate, ordinary modern day human archetype
- Created to appeal to Australian fans

A Mouth on Legs



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Doctor tries to get her home, fails, and she lets him know it

Stubborn Goodbye



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 13:54) -----

- Leaves after seeing too much violence, even in weakness she is still strong in her own way, leaves against the Doctor's wishes

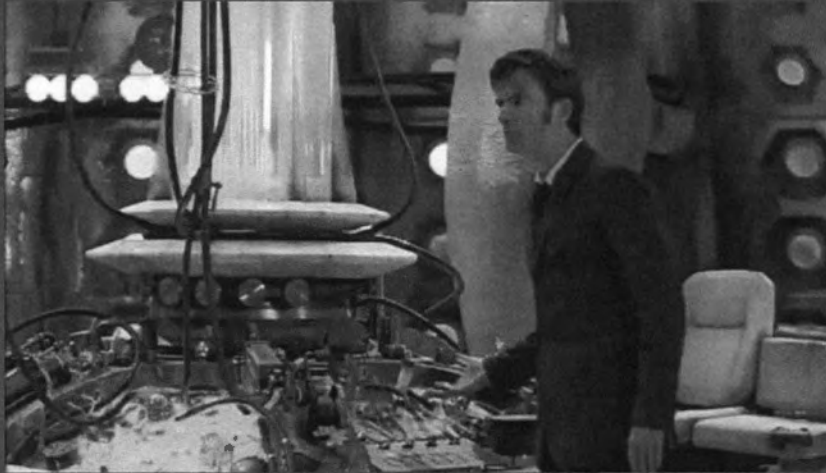
Donna Noble



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 14:07) -----

- Fortysomething temp from 2000s London
- Older than Rose or Martha, much more confident and willing to challenge the Doctor than her predecessors
- Funny, outspoken, world class smart mouth, no romantic interest in the Doctor whatsoever
- Reinforces that the Doctor needs his companions just as much as they need him

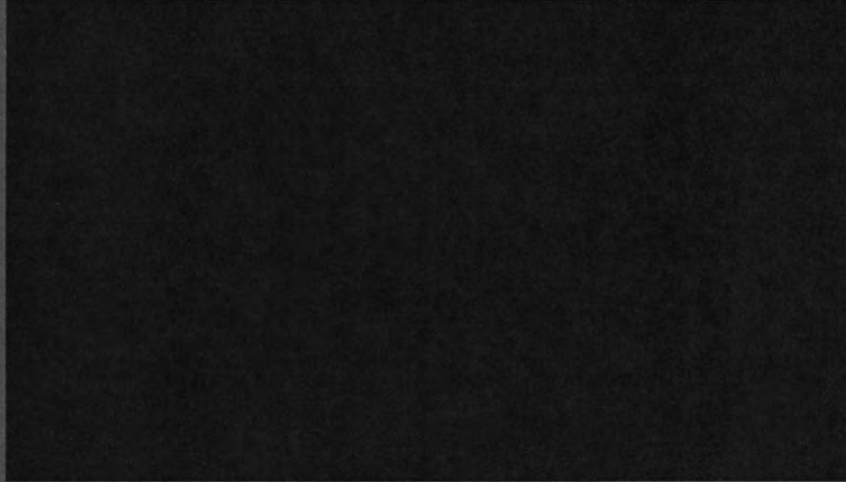
Outspoken



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 14:07) -----

- Teleported to her spaceship on her wedding day, entitled to be a little cheesed off
- Does not take his eccentricities or arrogance in stride

Not a Couple



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 14:07) -----

- Running joke about the two not being a couple

The Doctor Needs Her Too



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 14:07) -----

- Shown alternate world where she never met The Doctor, disastrous consequences
- He needs her every bit as much as she needs him, "most important woman in the whole of creation"

River Song



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 14:07) -----

- Archaeologist from the 51st Century
- The Survivor, always in control, manipulates things and people to her will
- Flirty, funny, mad, unpredictable, well versed in time travel and alien worlds
- From the Doctor's own future, knows far more than he does
- Strong bond, she knows the Doctor's greatest secret

Answer to The Question



----- Meeting Notes (11/6/15 14:07) -----

- The answer to the series oldest question, Doctor Who?
- She is to him what he's been to so many, the Doctor's Doctor

Conclusion

- ◉ The women of *Doctor Who* are expected to fall into a very distinct set of characteristics. A good number of them may fit into them, but many manage to bend, if not break, these stereotypes. A Victorian lady can be frightened yet strong. A savage can have a fertile, intelligent mind. A 1960s schoolteacher can be a charismatic leader. A temp from the modern day can be the most important woman in the whole of Creation. Being expected to fall into a set mold does not confine one to it.

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